



# World Wetland Network Wetland Globes

**Category:** Grey Globe Award, Neotropics

**Name of wetland:** Lago de Tota, Colombia

**Location:** Lat: 5.54184 Long: -72.92416 **Area:** 6,000 Ha (lake) and 24,000 Ha (watershed).



**Type and key characteristics:** Lago de Tota is a tropical high Andean lake on the eastern side of the Colombian Andean mountains. The largest of Colombia's lakes, it holds 2,000 million cubic metres of water, providing water to nearly 500,000 people in the region. The lake was designated an IBA site in 2008, and has had 116 bird species recorded since 2003, 7 of them endemic, and some endangered or at risk of extinction at an international level notably the Bogota Rail, and Apolinar's wren, both Endangered according to IUCN. The last sighting of the now extinct Colombian grebe was at lake Tota.

**Justification for why the wetland won the award:** The Lago de Tota suffers from a combination of point source and diffuse pollution, impacts of nearby industry, caged trout fisheries and over-abstraction. Introduction of commercially important fish species has also led to the extinction of the pez graso or grease fish. This situation is a result of a number of factors, largely an overall lack of knowledge and education on wetlands, their functioning and importance for people and wildlife. Importantly the lake is not designated under any form of protection.

**Quotes:** "After learning more about the problems of the lake, there is a growing need to protect, preserve and defend it. Yes, we need international recognition, as well as raising everyone's awareness; losing 5,600 hectares of still beautiful ecosystem would be unforgivable. We must take ownership, understand and take responsibility for these issues. We are responsible not only for the problem but also the solution."

"The iconic Lake Tota, the most important natural reservoir of Colombia, is disappearing day by day. Its deterioration is no longer a secret. It is terrible news . . . which the Foundation Montecito, the civil movement Mocilato, and leading authorities of the department of Boyacá have brought to the attention of environmentalists worldwide. . ." (press: Editorial/ El Tiempo, Roberto Pombo, 26.4.2012)

**Lessons learnt:** The Grey Globe definitely helps to raise awareness among local people and authorities of the need for urgent action. Running a strong and creative campaign is very important, and getting the media involved is vital if it is to lead to positive change. This impacts on politicians as wetland threats are publicised, ultimately leading to a reaction at governmental level.

However, exposing bad practice can be risky for campaigners, especially if it threatens economic and political/bureaucratic power. We need to present positive solutions for those local stakeholders that rely on the lake.



**Future plans for the wetland:** Designation as a Ramsar site. Government development of a Wetland Centre, and a "Centro Tota", a hub to host various officers devoted to the monitoring and protection of the Lago de Tota, its watershed, and High Mountain valuable ecosystems (*Páramos* or moor).



WWN is using the Grey Globe award to highlight wetlands that are actively being degraded, are being neglected, or are currently subject to a threat that is likely to lead to significant damage. The award is specific to a wetland and not the wetland management body, as factors affecting the wetland may be beyond their control. The award is intended to raise awareness of specific threats, and to encourage stakeholders and governments to find solutions to better protect and restore wetlands.

